

## When a Picture Really Is Worth a Thousand Words

By Penelope C. Paine

When asked to recall memories of our earliest books and stories, inevitably we remember the illustrations. Whether a religious story, cartoon, nursery rhyme or ABC book, those indelible images are stored for life. As a young friend explained, “The words are only there for people who can’t read the pictures.” And children read pictures very well.

The relationship between an author and illustrator, the words and the pictures, is unique to the children’s picture book. The key to a successful book often rests with the illustrations. While sometimes the author and illustrator may be the same person; many books are the result of shared creativity. So it goes without saying that for the self-published author finding the right illustrator is critical.

I asked Itoko Maeno, an award-winning illustrator who has 17 books in print, if any of her illustrations had been especially popular with children. Itoko reminded me of an illustration from one of my own stories, *Time for Horatio*. Horatio, a kitten, stops “mean time” by stopping Big Ben. He then clings to the giant clock’s minute hand until rescued. In her illustration, Itoko shows a foreshortened view of Big Ben to accommodate all the on-lookers in Parliament Square. Horatio is but a tiny orange dot on the page. “Children love to find the kitten,” Itoko explains. “Who would have thought that for all the elaborate work I have produced, a dot smaller than a pin head would be such a hit!”

Itoko went on to explain that it is important to create the world of the story, and how for her books she becomes completely engrossed in the character. “It’s like an actress getting into the part. If I am Minou, a Parisian cat, I actually see how it is to be on all fours, and I try to think and feel like Minou!”

Finding the right artist means finding someone who knows the techniques and technology involved, who can work with consistency and in a timely manner. Just as the author must be wary of using a retired English teacher neighbor as an editor, the old school friend, spouse or niece who is “good at art” might not be a good choice as an illustrator.

Also, as in writing, there is a need for an “art” editor. This could be you, the author, or someone with publishing experience you hire. First consider the art style you want – line, crayon, wash, cartoon, etc. Find samples of similar styles by visiting bookstores and libraries. Children like bright colors, action and small details. When you have a sense of what might work, ask publishers, librarians, editors, newspaper staff for recommendations. Contact publishing organizations such as Publishers Marketing Association and the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators for information. The Literary Market Place (found in library reference sections) has many listings of both organizations and artists.

When seeking an illustrator, it is important to follow some guidelines:

Share a clean, easy-to-read, pagged manuscript, preferable with notations regarding desired illustrations. Collect and share pictures, maps, photographs, a toy or whatever might help to inspire the illustrator.

Make sure both of you understand the printing and separating process so that work prepared in the most efficient and usable manner.

An illustrator will probably require an advance against royalties, which can vary in amount and will depend on experience.

If a sample illustration is required, expect to pay up to \$1000 for a double page spread and allow six weeks for completion.

Be clear on your time schedules and requirements.

Establish meeting points throughout the project. These may be by e-mail, telephone, in person, or via the fax.

Consider the geographical logistics. Will you be able to work with an artist in California if you’re living in Miami?

Are you compatible? Can you communicate effectively and share this creation? Could you ask for a piece to be redone?

Put the agreement in writing and allow for termination should artwork not be produced satisfactorily or in the arranged time frame. Remember that artists, just like everyone else, have family problems, natural disasters, creative blocks, etc.

If, indeed a picture is worth a thousand words, an illustrator is adding as much as 32,000 words to your story! Be supportive, have confidence, encourage creative input, and remember that part of your success as an author rests with the illustrator.